



# The next three years 2018-21:

Making a difference for transport users



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Jeff Halliwell

# Our Role

## What is Transport Focus?

Transport Focus is a consumer organisation – a champion for the transport user. Our mission is to make a difference for transport users, to make transport services better.

**W**e are the independent, statutory, consumer watchdog for Britain's rail passengers, bus, coach and tram passengers in England (outside London) and all users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads – the Strategic Road Network (SRN). Transport Focus's statutory roots go back nearly 70 years.

We gather evidence and use it to drive change and make a difference. We aim to be useful to those who make decisions about transport and to help them make better decisions. **Transport Focus strives to give all transport users as powerful a voice as those that provide transport services and we listen to those users in a variety of ways.**

We use a mixture of insight, active advocacy, user group engagement, speaking at events, exhibitions, public meetings, traditional and digital media, our Transport User Voice newsletter and a website to get our message across and secure change.

The Scottish Government, Welsh Government and London Assembly each appoint one Board member, with others appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport. We have offices in London and Manchester and we have peripatetic workers and non-executive Board members spread across Great Britain.

## Devolution

Continued devolution to Scotland and Wales, the rise of Transport for the North, Network Rail Supervisory Boards and other devolved structures, is having a growing effect on where and how we work.

All of our work is used by governments, administrations and the transport industry across Great Britain and beyond in helping shape services to better meet user needs.

We have therefore set out detailed specific work in particular countries or regions only where it is focused on one area or funded by third parties in those areas.

## Making a difference across different modes of transport

Some changes can be brought about relatively easily. Others take years. While investment has underpinned improvements to transport provision in the last few years, there is still much to be done. We want to see improvements in areas including fares, information and dealing with disruption – all key things that affect the consumer experience alongside the bedrock issue of performance.

In addition, we aim to ensure that every major decision taken about transport services – from local government funding of bus services to government

decisions about rail franchises – has user needs clearly taken into account. We have a unique multi-modal view of the transport user experience.

We intend to make more use of this valuable resource. We will start producing reports on Strategic Road Network, bus, rail and tram user satisfaction in particular regions and, assuming funding is secured, in Scotland and Wales as well. This will give governments and local authorities a much better comparative, benchmarked sense of user experiences and priorities leading to better informed investment decisions.

Our evidence and advocacy will inform and drive those decisions. We will do continue to do this with pride, energy and passion.

### **How we perform**

We have a robust Audit, Risk and Remuneration Committee coupled with an Internal Audit programme. Our accounts are audited by the National Audit Office. These and other controls ensure we deliver against our plans and secure best value for money for the taxpayer and other money invested in us. We carry out an annual Staff Attitude Survey.

This three-year plan is a rolling plan. Please look at our current year's workplan for our shorter-term priorities.

We are, and intend to remain:

- consumer focused
- useful to those we engage or work with
- evidence-based
- clearly making a difference

### **Jeff Halliwell**

Chair

# 1 How we are making a difference



## For rail passengers

- Our investigation into the rail industry's meeting its target of setting timetables at least 12 weeks in advance uncovered serious problems. The Secretary of State ordered an immediate review. Subsequently the industry has announced it will only be able to publish six weeks in advance for some months. We will work to ensure passengers don't lose out on cheaper tickets and assess the accuracy of fares and timetable information.
- Radically improved the way train companies deal with passengers without 'valid' tickets. The Government is now setting up, with our help, an independent appeals body for Penalty Fares. It has introduced a one-off leniency policy for passengers who forget railcards.
- Boosted the passenger voice in the rail franchise replacement process, leading to better services. Passenger priorities, based on our evidence, now guide the drafting of the franchise contracts and discussions with bidders, and are hard-wired into franchise targets.
- Dealt with hundreds of thousands of complaints where passengers have become deadlocked with train companies. Achieved over 70 per cent passenger satisfaction with how we dealt with their complaints. Fed back issues raised to Government, Network Rail and train companies and helped improve train company complaints handling.
- Amplified the passenger voice in operational and investment decisions – again, leading to better services. Over a million passengers have now had their voices heard in our National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS). Our seats on the emerging Route Supervisory Boards put passengers at the top table – we are actively collaborating with Network Rail on these new mechanisms designed to bring track and train closer together. Our work on trust and passenger priorities for improvement is guiding government and industry investment decisions.
- Our insight and advocacy work (carried out over eight years) now underpins the *Action plan for information on rail fares and ticketing* created jointly by the Government, industry and Transport Focus. In time this will lead to improvements in ticket vending machines, fares information and, hopefully, end the need for 'split ticketing'.
- The current industry work on improving information during planned and unplanned disruption stems directly from our advocacy. We have helped improve the handling of passenger information during works at Glasgow Queen Street, Bath, London Waterloo, Reading, Birmingham New Street and London Kings Cross, and are gearing up for a similar major piece of work at London Euston.
- Continue to publicly hold the industry to account for its performance. Over the past year we have questioned, in public, the managing directors of Great Western Railway, Virgin Trains (west coast), and South Western Railway, as well as the Network Rail chairman and route directors.



## For bus passengers

- Built the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) from scratch. Since 2009 more than 315,000 passengers have taken part. The comparison of services across the country and between bus companies drives change – local authorities and bus companies want and need to be seen to be doing well.
- It is now funded by bus companies, the Scottish and Welsh governments, local authorities and Transport Focus.
- Helped to drive the introduction of smarter ticketing on buses, removing potential barriers to travel. Our extensive insight work in this area has helped ensure a passenger focus to improvements.
- Boosted the passenger voice in operational and investment decisions. We chair the West Midlands Bus Alliance and take part in the Merseyside City Region Bus Alliance, the West Yorkshire 'Bus 18' group and the Bristol City Punctuality Task Force.
- The BPS is a key tool for these partnerships, measuring performance between authorities and bus companies and helping to improve services.
- Provided a major input to the Bus Services Act, helping to ensure its provisions are passenger-focused. In time the use of the powers in the Act, or changes driven in the light of it, should lead to improved services.



## For tram passengers

The Tram Passenger Survey has led to many wins for passengers. The Manchester Metro is now running longer trams and has deployed more on-board staff to deal with perceptions of antisocial behaviour. The otherwise high scoring Edinburgh tram lagged on frequency – now boosted.



## For road users

- Set up, from scratch, a new Strategic Roads User Survey, launched on 2 April 2018. This dramatic boost to the road user voice will, in time, give a new vibrancy and urgency to the need to listen to users' views.
- Helped focus Highways England's attention on the need to improve the handling of incidents and roadworks. There have been improvements to information and welfare provision and a reduction in the use of very long sections of roadworks as a result.
- Put improvements to road surfaces at the top of the agenda. Our priorities for improvement research flagged this as a key issue and highlighted the need to properly maintain and renew existing roads, as well as expand capacity.
- Made sure HGV drivers' views were heard in discussions about facilities at the proposed Kent lorry holding area. Highlighted that lorry drivers need better information on the approaches to Dover. More generally, drove debate about the quantity and quality of roadside facilities for HGV drivers.
- Helped ensure the road user voice is being heard loud and clear in development of the second Road Investment Strategy 2020-25. This will make the investment decisions made more relevant to user needs.

# 2 How are we going to make a difference in the next three years?

## Main goals

We all build our lives around our transport decisions. We need to get to work, get home to pick up kids, get to the cinema or visit friends at the weekend. Lorries deliver virtually everything we rely on. Transport matters to individuals and the economy. Day in, day out, consistent performance is key.

We focus on both the shorter and longer term. Transport users need change now to help their daily journeys – they can't wait for strategies or visions. However, significant change in transport systems takes planning, time and investment so we also work on longer-term issues.

It is crucial that we are known for the quality and scale of our evidence gathering. We cannot secure change unless we can show that the issues we work on need improvement.

Finally, we can only be as good as our people – so we need to make sure they are skilled, knowledgeable and motivated.

Our first goal is to **make a difference for today's transport user**. We cannot always wait for long-term improvements. Today's users want the promises made to them (for which they pay a lot) about timetables, journey times, information, ticket types and complaints handling kept.

Of course, things will sometimes go wrong or there will be disruption caused by improvement works. Users know and understand that. However, how they are treated when things go wrong or services or road networks are disrupted is an acid test. In transport industries where service delivery is sometimes monopolistic it is crucial there is strong, reliable feedback from users.

An important part in improving services is long-term investment. That is why our second goal is **making a difference for tomorrow's transport user**.

Significant investments are being made across transport modes. Stakeholders and local communities must have

a strong voice in how priorities are decided. The time for transport users, who underwrite much of this investment through fares or taxes, to have an equal voice, is now. We will continue to engage with the various industries to make this a longer-term reality.

Our ability to make a difference for today and tomorrow is built around Transport Focus becoming a **hub for user insight and evidence** – our third goal.

Across all the modes of transport that we work on we will use our existing and new tracker surveys to spot and track good and not-so-good performance. We will also drive change for transport users using this comparative benchmarking data – no operator wants to be sitting at the bottom of their peer group and everyone wants to be top! We will work with operators on improvement plans where

poor performance has set in.

We also have a role to play in the devolution of service specification, provision and monitoring. This includes the English regions as well as Scotland and Wales. We aim to start producing cross-mode reports on user satisfaction in English regions where we have data from road, rail, tram and bus users. This will start to build a benchmarked picture of user satisfaction by region. We would like to do this in Scotland and Wales as well if funding is forthcoming.

We need to create a modern workplace where our people can do their best work. They need good IT, training and management. So our fourth goal is to **build a modern workplace for great people**. Staff attitude surveys indicate good levels of satisfaction and engagement from staff. We will maintain and boost this.

## 3 Our aims

We will continue to use our respected brand of evidence-based advocacy to bring about change in a number of key areas.

We have identified these areas from our existing insight work, complaints, and understanding where opportunities for change exist.

### Performance and disruption

- Monitor, analyse and help improve daily performance through our four tracker surveys. We talk to hundreds of thousands of transport users about their most recent journey. The National Rail Passenger Survey, the Bus Passenger Survey, the Tram Passenger Survey and the Strategic Roads User Survey provide high quality, representative, benchmarked data on performance which drives improvement.
- Work with transport providers where performance is weak to help drive change.
- Planned improvement works require careful consideration of user engagement, knowledge and communication before, during and afterwards. We will continue to work with the transport industry on specific projects.
- Unplanned disruption is a key driver of dissatisfaction. We will strive to improve the handling of such disruption with a particular focus on communication, and welfare in extreme situations.

### Rail complaints, redress and compensation

- Each year we advocate on behalf of passengers who appeal to us for help. We aim to achieve 70 per cent passenger satisfaction with the way we handled a complaint.
- Work to make the launch of the Rail Passenger Ombudsman Scheme a success for passengers.

- Work to improve the National Rail Conditions of Travel and implementation of the Consumer Rights Act 2015.

### Fares and ticketing

- Using our unique research we will advocate the spread and take-up of smarter ticketing options.
- Work to simplify and make ticket purchase more informed.

### Boosting the user voice in long-term decision making

- Start to develop regional multi-modal user satisfaction reports.
- Continue to provide passenger input during rail franchise replacements.
- Represent passengers on the emerging Network Rail Route Supervisory Boards.
- Extend the representation of passengers on local authority and bus company alliances and any new franchising or partnership arrangements.
- Continue to voice the passenger view during industry and government investment decision-making. Among other opportunities this will include the Roads Investment Strategy 2 (2020-5) and rail industry 2019-24 spending period.

### Accessibility

- Produce cross-mode reports on the experiences of transport users with disabilities, identifying priorities for improvement.
- Continue to host our Accessibility Forum where user experiences can be discussed and understood as well as spreading good practice.



## 4 Making Transport Focus a hub for user insight and evidence

We should be the first port of call when major decisions are being made about transport services and investment. We should be the first place journalists and commentators come to when writing about transport. We can influence effectively only if we have strong evidence to back up our arguments. Everyone has anecdotes about their journeys. We will continue to speak to hundreds of thousands of transport users to understand their priorities. All of our work is published, available to all and used by many.

We aim to spend around one third of our income on insight activities. The quality of this work is crucial. We have built up good, long-term relationships with the research agencies which we commission to carry out most

of our work. The NRPS is an Official Statistic, and used to set rail franchise KPIs - we are proud of that.

We will continue to improve innovation and quality in our insight work, trying to build faster feedback which retains the representativeness and, ultimately, the usefulness of what we produce. We are making increasing use of our Transport User Panel which now has over 80,000 participants.

We are thought leaders in this area. In April we will host, together with Heathrow Airport, a conference on the development of more digital and innovative ways of gathering satisfaction data. We will bring together experts and business leaders to share views, ideas and best practice from other sectors.

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## 5 A modern workplace for great people

- We are focused on managing performance within Transport Focus simply and fairly with systems and procedures that support people and remove the barriers to them producing great work.
- We will promote and attract the right people based on their attitude, experience, knowledge and skills. We develop staff to make sure they can make the best of internal opportunities.
- We are committed to promoting the principles and practices of diversity and equality.
- We offer competitive salaries comparable with Civil Service organisations. However, quality of life, flexible working, opportunities and a supportive working environment is also a big part of how we recruit and retain staff.
- We will provide our people with a good environment to work in, including the equipment and systems needed to be productive and cope with current and future needs.

## 6 Excellent delivery, value for money and good governance

Transport Focus is sponsored by, but independent from, the Department for Transport. Most of our funding is from taxpayers although an increasing amount comes from other sources. It is right and proper we spend that money well. So we are committed to excellent delivery, value for money and good governance.

How we plan and account for our resources (of which people and time are far the biggest part) is important. We have a good track record of achieving positive internal audit inspections. Transport Focus is well run and we are determined to keep it that way.

- We will continue to ensure we have in place effective, proportionate work planning, risk management, governance, reporting and audit processes to help us make the best use of our resources.
- We are determined to deliver good value for money for taxpayers and farepayers. We do that through good planning, reviewing and learning from what works and what does not.
- We will continue to monitor stakeholder and staff views of our usefulness and effectiveness through surveys.

Transport Focus currently has eight Board members. New Board members will be appointed over the life of this plan. The Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the London Assembly each appoints one, with other members – including the Chair - appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport.

The Board's key roles, supported by Transport Focus staff, are to:

- set the organisation's strategy
- agree the Workplan, budgets and key performance indicators, and oversee performance against these
- oversee operations, including finances, remuneration and risk assessments
- set the policy framework, and agree lines on major policy issues.

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Transport Focus's **Work and Insight Plans 2018-19** set out the details of our key campaign, insight and work objectives set in the context of this longer-term plan. **The Work Plan 2018-19** and **Insight Plan 2018-19** can be found here: [www.transportfocus.org.uk/about/our-goals/](http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/about/our-goals/)



## Contact Transport Focus

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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council

**Transport Focus is the independent consumer organisation representing the interests of:**

- rail passengers in Great Britain
- all users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads (the Strategic Road Network)
- bus, coach and tram users across England outside London.

**We work to make a difference for all transport users**